FATHOM
a French e-journal of Thomas Hardy studies

6 | 2019
Objects in Hardy and Conrad

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Annie Ramel

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/fathom/1449
DOI: 10.4000/fathom.1449
ISSN: 2270-6798

Publisher
Association française sur les études sur Thomas Hardy

Electronic reference
Annie Ramel, « The Ring in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*: Gaze and Voice as Surplus Objects », *FATHOM* [Online], 6 | 2019, Online since 01 October 2019, connection on 14 October 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/fathom/1449 ; DOI : 10.4000/fathom.1449

The Ring in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*: Gaze and Voice as Surplus Objects

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Annie Ramel

1 The "ring" is a key-signifier in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, where it forms a paradigmatic chain, begun in the wife-sale scene (chapter one) when Susan Henchard flings across the booth the wedding-ring that had once sealed her matrimonial "alliance" (a wedding-ring, in French) with her husband. The next morning, when Henchard awakes from his drunken sleep, he discovers a little shining object amidst various "odds and ends" dotting the grassy floor of the tent. He recognizes his wife's ring, and remembers the events of the previous evening. The Ring, the Roman amphitheatre of Casterbridge, is the setting of a scene where Susan and Henchard meet again and renew their "alliance", since Henchard, who has now become the powerful Mayor of Casterbrige, offers to (re)marry Susan in an attempt to mend matters. A secret meeting with Lucetta takes place there much later; the Ring is also the place from which Henchard spies on Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae. Part of the same series is the "stout copper ring", welded on to the nose of the bull that attacks Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane (Hardy 1987, 205), and the ring formed by the cups "round the margin of the great sixteen-legged oak table" at the Three Mariners (231) where Henchard ends his long term of abstinence from drink. The last term of the series is Henchard's return to the very spot where the tent had stood: "Here we went in, and in we sat down. I faced this way. Then I drank and committed my crime. It must have been just on that very pixy-ring that she was standing when she said her last words to me before going off with him" (319).

2 Much critical attention has been given to this paradigm by various commentators, including myself, but my intention in this article is to focus on the ring as *object*. Objects in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* are prominent from the very first pages of the book.

Henchard as he walks along with his wife "carrying a child" is described with great minutia, with particular insistence on his clothes and on the basket that he carries:

> He wore a short jacket of brown corduroy, newer than the remainder of his suit, which was a fustian waistcoat with white horn buttons, breeches of the same, tanned leggings, and a straw hat overlaid with black glazed canvas. At his back he carried by a looped strap a rush basket, from which protruded at one end the crutch of a hay-knife, a wimble for hay-bonds being also visible in the aperture" (Hardy 1987, 5) [1].

3 So far, the objects described only connote a "skilled countryman", a man in possession of objects that ought to ensure him a place on the labour market, and in society. The only slightly troubling detail is the verb "to carry", used both for the baby carried by the young woman and for Henchard's rush basket containing his tools. The parallel between a human being as object and Henchard's tools will be made explicit a few pages further with Henchard's agreement to part from his wife: "She shall take the girl if she wants to, and go her ways. I'll take my tools and go my way" (Hardy 1987, 12). The sale of a wife like a mare on a fair is about to take place.

4 Objects are in abundance in the small capitalistic world of Casterbridge, where Henchard and Farfrae prosper by trading corn and hay: articles for sale displayed in shop-windows (Hardy 1987, 31) or on trestles and boxes (61), ornaments and nice personal possessions enjoyed by Elizabeth-Jane when she finds herself in a position of affluence (87), the heavy and ornate furniture filling Henchard's dining-room "to profusion" (67), the food heaped by Henchard on Farfrae's plate "to a prodigal fulness" (65), etc. The society of Casterbridge anticipates our modern consumer society – where Lucetta can order two dresses from London just as one would now order them from Amazon![2] But affluence is the privilege of the few, and though some people may enjoy "roaring dinners", others "must needs to be put to for want of a wholesome crust" (32), while the poorer folks go hungry, "what with hard winters, and so many mouths to fill, and Goda'mighty sending his little taties so terribly small to fill'em with" (53).

5 But something is about to disturb this seemingly sturdy structure. The disruption is brought about, not by want, not by a lack of objects, but by a *surplus* object, an object which stands out as an anomaly, catching the eye as one too many in the well-ordered cosmos of symbolic reality. In the very first chapter, Henchard and Susan enter the tent selling furmity rather than the one selling ale and cider, but "there was more in that tent than met a cursory glance" (Hardy 1987, 9). That something more is the rum with which Mrs Goodenough slily laces Henchard's furmity – in Lacanian terms, I would say that Henchard's transgression takes him beyond the pleasure principle, into the realm of *jouissance*. From now on Henchard's reality is going to be encumbered by objects that are out of place, and whose illicit, untimely, or uncanny intrusion will disrupt reality and cause disaster. From "rum" we quickly move to "ring" (a ring which is not part of social constructs but lies among "odds and ends"). Then the paradigm of surplus objects is continued throughout the novel, with for instance the four ounce-pennies placed on Susan's dead eyes, then buried in the garden, but later dug out by Christopher Coney (121) – the question being whether objects belonging to death should rightly be allowed to encroach upon life. The back door with the leering mask at High Place Hall (141-142) is also typical, for it seems to serve no particular purpose, the occupant of the house (Lucetta) being unaware of its presence – or so she says (145).[3]

6 Tragedy is triggered by the presence of such objects, letters in particular: Susan's letter, "not to be opened till Elizabeth-Jane's wedding-day" (Hardy 1987, 119), yet not

properly sealed and opened prematurely, or Lucetta's letters to Henchard. Lucetta's wish is to have them privately destroyed, so she asks Henchard to hand them back to her.[4] But she fails to come to the *rendez-vous*, Henchard keeps the letters, later reads them out to Farfrae (without revealing who had written them), then promises to return them to Lucetta. But he entrusts the wrong man with the mission of forwarding them to the right person, so that the letters fall into malevolent hands, and their contents are disclosed to the whole town. Disposing of them has proved impossible. The scandal that ensues involves two more surplus objects: the effigies carried around in the "skimmity-ride", Lucetta's effigy causing her death, but Henchard's floating effigy ("a something floating in the circular pool", 297) saving him from drowning – so he believes (298-299). During the skimmity-ride, something rather strange happens: the two constables, frightened by the crowd, push their "Gover'ment staves" up a water-pipe so as not to be noticed as law officers. The staves, then, which symbolize the Law, are surplus objects that must be hidden! Questioned by a prominent burgess about the skimmity-ride, Jopp replies that he has seen and heard nothing, while hiding in his great-coat pocket "a pair of kitchen tongs and a cow's horn, thrust up under his waistcoat" (281). At Peter's Finger, the landlady conceals a tambourine in the oven. The series of surplus objects ends with the goldfinch in its cage, which Henchard intended as a wedding-gift to Elizabeth-Jane but which he forgets when he departs suddenly, leaving the poor little songster to starve to death. Such an "object" cannot be given as a present: it cannot find a place in reality, it can only be in excess of it.

7 The question which arises then concerns the law: is it only the social law which is broken by the presence of those disruptive objects, or is it something far more fundamental? I will argue that such intrusions always involve eye-sight or voice, and that the "something more" that meets the eye or the ear is the object-gaze and/or the object-voice. As I have already explained elsewhere (Ramel 2018), the object-gaze is the point from which the Other sees me, but it is not a permanent fixture, it may be briefly glimpsed when the light "focuses on a luminous spot which may figure the gaze, which incarnates for a moment the all-seeing gaze of the big Other" (Miller 103). Should that object-gaze be included in reality, our experience of reality then would lose its consistency, for "something must be excluded, 'primordially repressed'" (Žižek 1996, 91) if we are to have normal access to reality. The same applies to the object-voice[5] (the voice of the Other), which has to be "extracted" from our reality. Here, in Hardy's novel, tragedy is caused by the gaze and the voice of the Other being included in the protagonists' experience of reality: is not Lucetta killed by the Other prying into her past, by the sound and the fury of the *vox populi*?

8 I will start with the gaze *qua* object. Something goes wrong with the gaze right from the first chapter, with Henchard watching the furmity-woman's proceedings "from the corner of his eye". Nothing seems amiss in the following chapters (whose focus is mostly on Elizabeth-Jane looking through windows). But then, all of a sudden, an object comes in the way, it is a luminous spot which catches Farfrae's attention, "something white fluttering in the morning gloom": "'For maircy's sake, what *object*'s this?' said Farfrae" (Hardy 1987, 99, my emphasis). That "something white" is soon identified as the part of Abel Whittle's white shirt showing below his waiscoat – for Henchard has ordered Whittle to go to work half-naked because he has overslept and is late again. Whittle says that he "cannot outlive the disgrace", that he will kill himself afterwards. Farfrae orders him to go back home and get dressed, in defiance of Henchard's command (99-100). That seemingly insignificant episode is the little seed that will "lift

the foundation" (97) of the friendship between Henchard and Farfrae. Farfrae becomes the most admired man in Casterbrige, while Henchard's public image is in decline. Henchard is made gloomy by public talk about him: "I have been hearing things that vexed me", he says (102). Pained by hearing and seeing (or being seen), Henchard nurtures a sense of a rivalry between himself and Farfrae.

9 The next crucial episode is the day of public rejoicing, when Henchard's entertainment is a dismal failure because of the rain, while Farfrae's "pavilion" under canvas is a tremendous success. Again Henchard is hurt by remarks that he hears, also by the frantic music that the band is playing and to which the people are dancing ("a tune of a busy, vaulting-leaping sort"; Hardy 1987, 108) – the pain being the sharper as he sees Elizabeth-Jane dancing with Farfrae. A little detail catches his eye: "the pattern of the shining little nails in the soles of his boots [...] familiar to the eyes of every bystander" (108). The object-gaze, the gaze of the Other, is there, transiently figured by those shining nails. But at this stage it is a mere threat, a little seed that will grow into something bigger and more disquieting. The scene causes Henchard to dismiss Farfrae, who goes his own way and sets up on his own account. In the corn-market room, where the large farmers and corn-merchants have their names painted on their stalls, there appears a new name, "Farfrae", "in *staring* red letters" (116, my emphasis). The ambiguity of the verb "to stare" in English, which means both "to be unpleasantly prominent" and "to look fixedly" (COD), makes it plain that here the gaze of the Other is reaching Henchard – exactly like the "staring vermilion words" in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (Hardy 1991, 85)[6].

10 The skimmity-ride, which will prove fatal to Lucetta, is a climax in the growth of the destructive power of the gaze *qua* object. A few signs act as fore-runners of the disaster. When Lucetta goes to meet Henchard at the Ring, she veils herself, "to avoid the contingency of being recognized", but the veil is to no avail, for the Other's gaze is there, only waiting to destroy her: "The sun was resting on the hill like a drop of blood on an eyelid" (Hardy 1987, 249). One thinks of Boldwood staring at the Valentine card, whose red seal becomes "as a blot of blood on the retina of his eye" (Hardy 1986, 80). On the morning of the visit of the Royal Personage, there is "permanence" in the glow of the sun, "a full-faced sun confronting early window-gazers eastward" (Hardy 1987, 263). There is no closing the eyelid of the Other. When Henchard has handed to Jopp the bundle of letters that he wishes him to deliver at Mrs Farfrae's, something catches his eye: "Jopp sat on till his eyes were attracted by the shadow of the candle-snuff on the wall, and looking at the original he found that it had formed itself into a head like a red-hot cauliflower. Henchard's packet next met his gaze" (253). The packet meeting Jopp's gaze reminds him of "something of the nature of wooing" between Henchard and Mrs Farfrae, and thus begins the process that will eventually lead to Jopp opening the bundle of letters at Peter's Finger and disclosing its contents. Disruption is caused by a seemingly insignificant object – a figure of the gaze *qua* object.

11 And then the thing happens, the terrible thing that Lucetta sees and hears, and which kills her. It involves both gaze and voice: first Lucetta is disturbed by "a hubbub in the distance", which increases till it becomes a "din" (Hardy 1987, 277). Then she hears the voice of two maid-servants speaking to each other from upper windows in the street, one of them seeing the scene and reporting to the other. From the description Lucetta infers that it is an effigy of herself, and of Henchard, which the procession is carrying on a donkey, and that her past is being exposed to the public eye. She knows that she

has been reached by the gaze of the Other. Elizabeth-Jane rushes into the room and tries to close the shutters and the window ("'Let us shut it out,' coaxed Elizabeth-Jane", 278), but to no avail: there is no way in which the voice can be hushed, or the "scandal" kept out of sight. Something in both sight and sound is irresistible: "Let it be – hush!" (278), "I will see it" (279), are Lucetta's peremptory words to stop Elizabeth-Jane. Lucetta's face grows rigid, as though she were petrified by a Medusean gaze. The image of the scandalous pair will be seen by Farfrae, she believes, and seeing has a lethal power: "He will see it, won't he? Donald will see it. He is just coming home – and it will break his heart – he will never love me any more – and oh, it will kill me – kill me" (278). The scene reaches a climax when the procession comes closer and Lucetta's eyes are "straight upon the spectacle of the uncanny revel", while "the numerous lights around the two effigies [throw] them up into lurid distinctness" (279). Seeing herself as seen by the Other actually kills Lucetta: she has a "fit" (279-280), an "epileptic seizure" (in the narrator's words, 279), and she dies of it.

12 Lucetta's position (under the gaze of a malevolent Other) has similarities with what a paranoiac might fancy and, characteristically, it mixes voice and gaze, or more precisely it makes the gaze audible:[7] the effigy – the surplus object – is the object-gaze staring at Lucetta, and at the same time it is a voice that cannot be hushed. Lucetta cannot avoid seeing herself being seen, nor can she silence the deafening voice of the Other. That voice heard through a window (while one normally sees through a window), which causes Lucetta's attention to be "riveted to the matter" (Hardy 1987, 277), or rivetted to "it", the Thing,[8] is reminiscent of an earlier scene, when Susan first hears "tones caught from the inn-window which strangely rivet[ed] her attention" (34). It is as though the gaze were made audible.

13 The paradigm of voice – an intrusive, compelling, irresistible voice – is sustained all along the novel. At the beginning, it is the voice of Henchard, often characterized as a "roar": "'why didn't she know better, than bring me into this disgrace!' he roared out" (Hardy 1987, 19). Then, once he has become "the masterful, coercive mayor of the town" (83) who makes Susan feel "overpowered" (35), his voice sounds like that of some kind of divine master, comparable to the Freudian father of the primitive horde, an "uncastrated" father whose enjoyment is supposed to be boundless.[9] The inhabitants speak of the "roaring dinners" enjoyed by the rich, who "blare their trumpets and thump their drums" (32). Henchard's "commanding voice" (34) is always a "roar", whether he addresses Abel Whittle (98), or the choir-members (233) to compel them to sing a psalm that they object to. That "thunderous" voice (168) which, like "Yahweh's voice" (Lacan 2004, 281-295), commands total compliance, is similar to the sound of shofar in the Jewish ritual (287), "a prolonged sound reminiscent of a bull roaring" (Dolar 2006, 53; Lacan 2004, 289) by which the community asserts its submission to the Law – interestingly, Henchard is compared to a bull ("a bull breaking fence"; Hardy 1987, 269), as well as to a lion ("a netted lion", 303, a "fangless lion", 309). "What object is this?" asks Lacan. "The object called the voice" he replies (Lacan 2004, 290, my translation).

14 But what the *shofar* makes us hear is the roar of a "stunned bull",[10] the cry of the dying primal father of the primitive horde, and the function of that voice, "apart from presentifying God, is also to remind God that he is dead, in case he had forgotten" (Dolar 1996, 26). In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* too, the omnipotent Father's voice is broken: as the tale unfolds, the "bull-roarer" loses his power, his voice becomes

"softened" (Hardy 1987, 234), "subdued" (250), until it dwindles into pure silence: the "murder of the Father" takes place, but in tragedy the sacrifice is not symbolic, it is real. The "roar" then becomes what Henchard hears, what he is subjected to. It all begins with the description of the Ring (chapter XI): a silent place where a person sitting with a book or dozing might suddenly hear the "roar" of the excited voices of Roman soldiers watching a gladiatorial combat (71-72). The bank of the river is the place to which Henchard resorts when he is in a mournful mood, and there he can hear the water roaring down a back-hatch "like the voice of desolation" (127), or the "terrific roar" of a cascade (221), or he fancies he can catch "the tune of the roaring weir", like the mob gathering there in the old days to watch an execution (127). The series aptly ends with the "uproar" of the skimmity-ride, the "roars of sarcastic laughter" which go off "in ripples" immediately after Lucetta's fall (279). The terrible "roar" is now the indomitable voice of a malevolent Other.

15 The "roar" is often associated with the sound of trumpets (Hardy 1987, 32, 244, 296) and horns – a fact not altogether surprising, for the voice of Yahweh inevitably calls to mind the trumpets of the Last Judgement (*Revelation*, I, 10). But another signifier plays a major part in the novel: the word "ring". The ringing of bells always heralds the misfortunes that befall Henchard: the bells are ringing for the wedding of Lucetta and Farfrae (214, 216); there is "a great ringing of bells" (243) in Casterbridge to celebrate Farfrae's election as Mayor ("the bell-ringing, and the band-playing loud as Tamerlane's trumpet, goaded the downfallen Henchard indescribably", 244). It is as though the bells persecuted Henchard, for they sound like the voice of a cruel Other: "The ring of the bell spoke to him like the voice of a familiar drudge who had been bribed to foresake him" (244). For the citizens of Casterbridge watching the London highway on the day of the Royal visit, "the ringing of bells" (265) is a social ritual, but for Henchard it is the voice of the Other addressing *him*. A voice which cannot be silenced, like the uproar raised by the crowd in the skimmity-ride, which Elizabeth-Jane cannot shut out. Such a voice, "the intractable voice of the Other that impose[s] itself upon the subject" (Dolar 1996, 14) is the object-voice.

16 But as the novel draws to a close, the "revelry" (Hardy 1987, 325) comes to an end: the bells ringing for Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae's wedding become "the soft *pealing* of the Casterbridge bells" (323, my emphasis). We read about the hiring of the town band for the celebration (323), Henchard hears from a distance the voice of Farfrae singing, and then the rest is silence: no more music is heard, the detailed description of the dance-scene focuses not on sound but on the gyrations of the dancers as seen by Henchard, on the "saltatory intentness" (326) of both Farfrae and Newson. Nothing is said about the band, its instruments, the sound produced. It is as though the guests were dancing in silence, in typical Hardyan fashion (see Ramel 136-137). Absolute silence is reached with Henchard's failure to speak: "Henchard's lips half-parted, to begin an explanation; but he shut them up like a vice, and uttered not a sound" (Hardy 1987, 327). His voice will be heard no more, neither will the voice of "the poor little songster" (329) starved to death in its cage,[11] nor the persecuting voice of the Other. Henchard's *silent* voice is finally heard in the written text of his will, which requires (among other things) that "no sexton be asked to toll the bell", and that "Elizabeth-Jane be not told" of Henchard's death (333). That Elizabeth-Jane should not be *told,* and that the bells should not be *tolled*, is quite ironical, for indeed we as readers have been told at length about the story, as we are about to close the book.

17 So the climax reached by the story is absolute silence, which may be understood as the final resolution of a tragic plot where a compelling voice has played such a crucial role. Yet, at the same time, the "absolute, deadly silence, supreme fascination and horror" (Poizat 92) is precisely what makes audible the inaudible object-voice. That point is made by Žizek:

> The voice qua object is precisely what is 'stuck in the throat', what cannot burst out, unchain itself and thus enter the dimension of subjectivity [...]: if the exemplary case of the gaze *qua* object is a blind man's eyes, i.e. eyes which do not see [...], then the exemplary case of the voice *qua* object is a voice which remains silent, i.e., which we do not hear.[12] (Žižek 2001, 117)

18 Giving presence to the vocal object, such is, paradoxically, the effect of silence. The surplus object (voice in the present case) turns into a void, the void of The Thing, i.e. absolute nothingness – "the nothing", *le rien*, which is another object listed by Lacan. Another paradox is that of the written text, which is but silence yet allows us to be told a story. As my colleague Claude Maisonnat has argued in his book on Conrad and voice, "the textual voice can be considered as a qualified offshoot" of the Lacanian object-voice (Maisonnat 51), its "literary by-product", in that it is "silent yet active" (53).

19 But the very essence of the textual voice is, according to Maisonnat, that it "accommodates" *jouissance*, leaving us to enjoy only fragments of a massive and destructive enjoyment:

> Now, the textual voice is not the literary equivalent of the object-voice proper, it is only one of its positive avatars, the agency that assuages it by metabolizing the affects associated with it, so that within the subject's linguistic production an inner voice challenges it, producing the "unheard melodies"[13] which are the sweetest to Keats's ears. The paradox, and the miracle of the textual voice, in so far as it is the hallmark of all great writing, is that what cannot be represented – the voice as object – returns with the signifying chain and is perceptible to the discriminating reader short of being heard. This immaterial voice brings to the text what is known as *surplus jouissance* and does not only make for the literary quality of the work but ensures its textual appeal which explains why generations of readers will continue to enjoy reading it. (Maisonnat 52)

20 Thus, in Hardy's text, the unbearable "ring" that so oppresses Henchard turns into a poetic "ring" which resonates silently "in the void of creation" (Maisonnat 58). To the paradigmatic chain formed by the repetition of the noun "ring" should be added the "ear-rings" (Hardy 1987, 260) swinging from the ears of the landlady of Peter's Finger – one of the perpetrators of the skimmity-ride who keeps a tambourine hidden in her oven. Those "ear-rings" work as a "hear-ring": they portend the awful din that will soon reverberate in Casterbridge, but they are part of an "unheard melody", the poetic ring whose silent resonance makes Hardy's text so pleasant to read. Indeed other "hear-rings" are overheard all along the text, finding their way into the innermost reaches of the narrative. They are often concealed in words referring to an imperious and cruel voice, such as "hearing things" (102), "the roaring weir" (127), "the nearing of the noise and laughter" (278), "hearing the din of cleavers, tongs, tambourines, [...]" (280). A remarkable example of Hardy's poetics is the following one:

> To the east of Casterbridge lay moors and meadows through which much water flowed. The wanderer in this direction, who should stand still for a few moments on a quiet night, might hear singular symphonies from these waters, as from a lampless orchestra, all playing in their sundry tones from near and far parts of the moor. At a hole in a rotten weir they executed a recitative [...]. The spot at which

> their instrumentation rose loudest was a place called Ten Hatches, whence during high springs there proceeded a very fugue of sounds. (Hardy 1987, 296)

21 The recurrence of the dipthong /ɪə/ (in "hear", "near", "weir") sounds like an invitation[14] to hear the "ring" which is so loud "during high springs", but it is not the voice of a commanding Other imposed upon the reader – for the reader is free to listen or not. He may, or he may not, lend his voice to the poetic "ring" of the text.

22 In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the "staring vermilion words" which face Tess "shout themselves out, and make the atmosphere ring" (Hardy 1991, 85, my emphasis). The gaze ("stare") turns into a voice, and the confusion of gaze and voice is made explicit by the paranomasis leading from "staring" to "ring". In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* too, "ring" is heard in "staring" (the "staring new letters", Hardy 1987, 116), "leering" ("the leering mask", 142), "louring" ("looking at her with a louring invidiousness", 132). Lucetta hears with her eyes like Tess, but we readers find a haven in the "rich resting-place of silence" (Rancière 32) afforded by the text, which assuages both gaze and voice while retaining in its meshes small particles of an untractable *jouissance*. After all, Jopp speaks some truth when, asked by Mr Grower whether he has heard "a gang of fellows making a devil of a noise", he answers: "Now I've noticed, come to think o'it, that the wind in the Walk trees makes a peculiar poetical-like murmur to-night" (281). Jopp (and Hardy) knew all about the capacity of the textual voice to accommodate *jouissance*! [15]

23 The metatextual dimension of Hardy's narrative is perceptible in several passages. Perhaps Henchard's silent will, written by himself on a piece of paper (even though "the pen and all its relations" are "awkward tools in his hands"; Hardy 1987, 253), could be seen as opening the "rich resting-place of silence" into which the reader is invited. The "poor little songster", "shrouded in newspaper" (329), is an even better figure of the silent textual voice: what better metaphor could be found for the "unheard melody" of a literary text than this song stifled by the "dry and papery"[16] matter enveloping its cage? A voice striving hard at producing a tune, and yet irrevocably silent, like the letters printed on a page – whether the page is that of a newspaper or that of a novel? Another metatextual element is Elizabeth-Jane as a figure of the writer. [17] She too has the capacity to hear through windows, that is to say to *hear with her eyes* – but as a flesh-and-blood character she also *gazes* through windows, she allows her desires to wander freely, and so her fate is not tragic. She is also a great reader of "books and looks" (Gaspari 7), as well as someone who has great skill in netting.[18] She has a know-how which enables her to cope with holes (she fits them into nets and does not allow herself to be engulfed in a tragic void). A writer too knows how to catch little fragments of the Real in the meshes of his texts/textiles, thus containing (in both senses of the word) a *jouissance* that might otherwise turn lethal. Through the process of *écriture*, the abyss opened by the intrusion of the surplus object (the object-gaze and /or the object-voice) is turned into a "*plus-de-jouir*" ("surplus enjoyment").[19] How to be satisfied with minute particles of enjoyment, that is what the final pages are about, as they dwell on a secret acquired by Elizabeth-Jane: "[...] the secret (as she had once learnt it) of making limited opportunities endurable; which she deemed to consist in the cunning enlargement by a species of microcospic treatment, of those minute forms of satisfaction that offer themselves to everybody not in positive pain" (Hardy 1987, 334).

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NOTES

1. When he leaves Casterbridge near the end of the novel, he buys a new tool-basket to carry "his old hay-knife and wimble", and sets himself up in "fresh leggings, kneenaps and corduroys", to go back to "the working clothes of his young manhood" (Hardy 1987, 312).

2. In that society the key-word is "value", applied not only to objects, but also to human beings: Farfrae would be "invaluable" to Henchard (Hardy 1987, 50), who at the end of the novel values himself very little (317, 327).

3. One may also mention the two empty glasses on the table at Henchard's right hand (the third glass being filled with water; Hardy 1987, 34), which are but the inverted image of the "something more" that had led to his inebriation. Or Henchard's waggon loaded with hay which gets entangled with Farfrae's in a thoroughfare and causes a blockage (191).

4. "[...] that no writings of mine, or trifling articles belonging to me, should be left in your possession through neglect or forgetfulness. [...] Can you meet me with the letters and other trifles?" (Hardy 1987, 118).

5. In his seminar on anxiety ("L'angoisse"), Lacan added two objects, the object-gaze and the object-voice, to the "partial objects" listed by Freud (the breast, the faeces, the penis...). For information on the Lacanian "object-voice", see Dolar 1996 or Dolar 2006; also *L'Opéra ou le cri de l'ange* by Michel Poizat, in its original French version (2001, 1rst ed. 1986) or in a translation (1992) – in particular the chapter entitled "L'objet-voix" (Poizat 2001, 141-149).

6. Here Henchard enters tragedy, but worse is still to come: later in the story, his name will be obliterated and replaced by Farfrae's ("a smear of decisive lead-coloured paint had been laid on to obliterate Henchard's name, though its letters dimly loomed through like ships in a fog. Over these, in fresh white, spread the name of Farfrae", Hardy 1987, 221). The object-gaze is such a threat that the vacant eyes of the dead Susan have to be hidden from sight by four heavy ounce-pennies, which keep the eye-lids closed. The mask over Lucetta's back-door exhibits "a comic leer" (141), as well as an open mouth, which Elizabeth-Jane cannot bear to look at.

7. "La paranoïa, [...] c'est un engluement imaginaire. C'est une voix qui sonorise le regard qui y est prévalent, c'est une affaire de congélation du désir" (Lacan, *Le Séminaire* XXII, 1975-1976, 42).

8. One should note the recurrence of the pronoun "it", whose phonemes are repeated all along: "[...] the latter knew it already", "Let us shut it out", "He will see it [...] Donald will see it", "it will kill me", "Is there nobody to do it?", "I will see it" (Hardy 1987, 278-279). The series ends quite logically with the word "fit". "It" is the very thing that kills Lucetta through her "fit", as though she had seen (and heard) what must remain unseen, unheard: the primordial object to which we are drawn, "the absolute aim of desire", the Thing (Braunstein 79), which in our reality remains unattainable – for the encounter with it could only mean death.

9. Of course Henchard is not a father, since he has abandoned his child. But as "cornfactor" – etymologically the "maker" of corn – he occupies the position of the first, of the *origin* of the seed of life, he is his own origin, "the new Adam, reborn, self-created, unencumbered" (Showalter 57). See also Ramel 2016.

10. "C'est son beuglement de taureau assommé qui se fait entendre encore dans le son du chofar" (Lacan 2004, 295).

11. I am indebted to Isabelle Gadoin for pointing this out to me at the Rouen conference.

12. Michel Poizat draws the same parallel between gaze and voice: "Just as the empty socket in the skull is what best makes immediate, or 'makes present', what Lacan called the seeing object [*l'objet-regard*], so the silence we are given to hear by the cry – the cry that by 'rending the silence' also lets it be heard – Is what best gives presence to the vocal object, paradoxical though this may seem" (Poizat 85).

13. Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter".

14. The text invites the reader (who identifies with "the wanderer in this direction", 296) to hear the singular symphonies played by the tumultuous waters, so that the passage has a metatextual dimension: it is about a voice, the "unheard melody" of its poetics (Ramel 2015, 159).

15. A cluster of signifiers forms another poetic series with *jouissance* throughout the text connected: "revel"/ "revelry", "rival"/ "rivalry", "reveal"/ "revelation", "rave", "revenge", "revive"/ "revival", "reverie", "reverberation", "riveted", "reverted", "ravine".

16. The voice of Egdon Heath is said to be "dry and papery" in *The Return of the Native* (Hardy 1990, 51).

17. About the dinner at High Place Hall in which Henchard and Farfrae sit stiffly side by side, "like some Tuscan painting of the two disciples supping at Emmaus", while Elizabeth-Jane watches them from a distance "like the evangelist who had to write it down" (Hardy 1987, 182), Fabienne Gaspari writes: "[...] Elizabeth-Jane becomes the evangelist, the witness in the picture but on the margin, at a distance from the central scene, herself a projection of the narrator/ painter" (Gaspari, n.p.).

18. "A wonderful skill in netting of all sorts – acquired in childhood by making seines in Newson's home", (Hardy 1987, 217).

19. Claude Maisonnat explains this process in precise terms: "[...] it is crucial to remember that *jouissance*, contrary to enjoyment, is a lethal abandonment to the fascination of disintegration, dissolution, a refusal of the Symbolic not so different from Freud's 'oceanic feeling', the temptation to meet the totality of a fantasized big Other, while *surplus enjoyment* refers to that part of *jouissance* that can be captured, accommodated by the signifying chain and the symbolic order mostly through artistic creation" (Maisonnat 421, n16). Voir "De la plus-value au plus-de-jouir" (Lacan 2006, 11-25).

ABSTRACTS

Like the ring discerned by Henchard on the grassy floor when he wakes up from his drunken sleep, surplus objects are found all along *The Mayor of Casterbridge*: objects which are disruptive out of place, in excess of reality, Letters, for instance, when read prematurely or by the wrong people, can cause disaster in the lives of the protagonists. But then such objects always involve eye-sight or voice, so I will argue that the "something more" which disrupts reality in this novel is the "object-gaze" or/and the "object-voice" (two Lacanian concepts), the climax in the story being the intrusion in Lucetta's reality of the two effigies representing herself and Henchard. Lucetta dies of a fit after this scene, killed by a vision of herself seen by others and by the indomitable "up*roar*" which persecutes her, whatever Elizabeth-Jane may do to shut out sight and sound. Indeed the "roar", like the "ring", is a voice that cannot be silenced. Absolute silence is reached when tragedy comes to a resolution: Henchard fails to reply to Elizabeth-Jane, shutting his lips "like a vice". He will be heard no more. Neither will the "poor little songster", the bird starved to death in its cage. The rest is silence. But then the literary text is precisely this: a silent voice, "dry and papery" (like the voice of the wind on Egdon Heath), which paradoxically can be a delight to the ear of the reader. Thus the tragic "ring" of the diegesis can be made into a "poetic ring" by Hardy's pen, which can turn the surplus object into a "surplus enjoyment" ("plus-de-jouir", in Lacan's formulation).

Comme l'alliance distinguée par Henchard sur le sol herbeux lorsqu'il s'éveille le lendemain de la soirée de beuverie où il a vendu sa femme, des objets "en trop" se trouvent tout long de *The Mayor of Casterbridge* : des objets qui dérangent, qui ne sont pas à leur place. Les lettres, par exemple, lues prématurément ou par des gens à qui elles ne sont pas destinées, peuvent amener le désastre dans la vie des personnages.Mais le regard et la voix sont toujours impliqués dans l'effet produit par ces objets. Je vais donc montrer que l'objet en trop qui vient déranger la diégèse est "l'objet-regard" et/ou "l'objet-voix" tels que conceptualisés par Lacan, un point culminant étant atteint avec l'intrusion dans la réalité de Lucetta de deux effigies, l'une la représentant et l'autre représentant Henchard. Lucetta meurt d'une crise d'apoplexie après cette scène, tuée par une vision d'elle même vue par les autres et par le vacarme ("uproar") qui la persécute, en dépit des efforts d'Elizabeth-Jane pour faire taire cette voix et masquer cette vision. Le vacarme ("roar"), tout comme le bruit des cloches sonnées à toute volée ("ring"), est une voix qu'on ne peut faire taire. On atteint le silence absolu lorsqu'advient la résolution tragique : Henchard ne répond pas à Elizabeth-Jane, il ferme ses lèvres entr'ouvertes comme un étau. On n'entendra plus jamais sa voix, ni celle du "pauvre petit chanteur", l'oiseau qui meurt de faim dans sa cage – autre objet "en trop". Le reste n'est plus que silence, mais le texte littéraire est exactement cela : une voix silencieuse, "sèche et parcheminée" (comme la voix du vent sur la lande d'Egdon) qui paradoxalement se donne à entendre et vient régaler notre oreille. "Ring" a pour Henchard une résonance tragique – qu'il s'agisse de l'alliance jetée à terre, du sinistre amphithéâtre romain, ou du bruit odieux des cloches célébrant son malheur. Dans le silence de son écriture, Hardy lui substitue un tintement poétique ("poetic ring"). L'objet en trop est devenu un "plus-de-jouir", selon la formule de Lacan.

INDEX

Keywords: ring, object, disruption, letter, object-gaze, object-voice, gaze, voice, silence, poetics, Lacan (Jacques)
oeuvrecitee Mayor of Casterbridge (The), Tess of the d'Urbervilles
Mots-clés: anneau, bague, résonance, objet, lettre, objet-regard, objet-voix, voix, regard, silence, poétique, Lacan (Jacques)

AUTHOR

ANNIE RAMEL

Annie Ramel, professor emeritus at Université Lumière-Lyon 2, is the president of FATHOM (French Association for Thomas Hardy Studies). Her publications include: *Great Expectations, le père ou le pire* (Messene, 2000), articles on Charles Dickens, Henry James, George Eliot, Oscar Wilde, Thomas Hardy. She co-edited *Rewriting/Reprising: the Paradoxes of Intertextuality* with Josiane Paccaud and Claude Maisonnat. She has edited or co-edited four volumes of the e-journal *FATHOM*, including the latest ("Desire and the Expressive Eye"), as well as the volume on "Liminality" of *The Hardy Review* (Spring 2013). She has published *The Madder Stain: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Thomas Hardy* (Brill-Rodopi, 2015).